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ABSTRACT

This article examines the interrelationship between teachers and their work of teaching, as observed in a study conducted in 1969 in Minneapolis and St. Paul, and intended to assess the extent and kind of attachments which secondary school teachers hold for their teaching when the total of life attachments and interactions is taken into account. It aimed to determine whether the global and rather complete dedication which often is assumed to be characteristic of professional occupations actually exists for metropolitan secondary school teachers. The findings of the study indicate that such global dedication of self to work does not exist for the secondary school teachers studied. (Author/DDO)

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TEACHING AS A "CENTRAL LIFE INTEREST" OF METROPOLITAN SECCNDARY TEACHERS

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by

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TEACHING AS A "CENTRAL LIFE INTEREST" OF METROPOLITAN SECONDARY TEACHERS

The American society is characterized by rapidly increasing technological sophistication, concentration of the population in metropolitan centers, challenge to traditional values and customs, further specialization of the labor force, expanding mass media influence, and urgency in international perspectives. These characteristics bring into sharp focus the need for improved and high level performance by teachers if education is to play a significant role in coping with these forces. The extent and kind of attachment to teaching held by persons presently in teaching roles seems to be of particular importance. As teacher education evaluates and responds to society's demands, a very important topic is the attachment of teachers themselves to the profession and role of teaching. This article relates to that topic.

THE STUDY

Systematic study of the relationship between man and his work is in fact of relatively recent origin. Wilonsky (10) states that "the dominant modern philosophies of work have in common a positive approval of labor . . . All modern states have developed ideologies which give work a positive central place." Wrenn (3) points out that the American work ethic was brought to this country by immigrants. It has the social dimensions inherited from the class system and the

religious justification value adopted from the religious systems of Western Europe. These values, coupled with demands of pioneer life and the later pressures of an individualistic early civilization, combined to form the American work ethic.

As the United States became industrialized and urbanized, workers were imported for machine operation and as slaves on southern plantations. In America a man has been thought capable of rising to any height if he works intelligently and hard enough. This notion that work is necessary, desirable, and good became an accepted norm from the very beginning in this country.

It was Dubin (5), in his study of the "Central Life Interests" of industrial workers, who challenged the assumptions of many previous researchers about man's social relationship to work. He posited that industrial workers hold jobs because remunerative work is made mandatory for them and not because of attachment to or affection for the job per se.

The subject of this article is the inter-relationship between teachers and their work of teaching, as observed in a study conducted in 1969 in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Its purpose was to assess the extent and kind of attachments which secondary school teachers hold for their teaching when the total round of life attachments and interactions is taken into account. It aimed to determine whether the global and rather complete dedication which often is assumed to be characteristic of professional occupations actually exists for metropolitan secondary teachers.

BEHAVIORAL MODEL

To provide a basis for analysis of teacher attachment to work and the workplace as compared to non-job oriented attachments, it was necessary to divide the phenomenal world of the teacher into two broad categories - - job oriented social worlds and non-job oriented social worlds. These two categories provided the possibility of measurement of teacher attachment to similar social acts in two different settings A preference for one setting over the other would reveal whether or not the teachers were more attached to teaching than they were to other life interactions.

It was also necessary to design and support a system of classification of social interaction which would provide a sample of the universe of behavioral properties possible within the two social worlds. Such an operational model would take into account: (1) where teachers would prefer to interact, (2) with whom teachers would prefer to interact, (3) what teachers would prefer to do, and (4) which interactions teachers value most highly.

Finally, the two behavioral systems which formed the basis for testing teachers' preferred interactions (job vs. non-job) were the formal and informal systems. The formal system consists of settings and interactions prescribed by the organizational and technical sub-systems. The informal system includes relationships and experiences which are neither controlled nor prescribed by the organization.

The model was applied to 1,247 teachers employed at least 3/5 time in grades 9-12 in ten Minneapolis and nine St. Paul high schools. The research instrument was a two-part questionnaire, well tested in

advance. Part I called for demographic data to test differences in attachment to teaching within the teacher group. Part II consisted of nine items designed to yield a measurement of the informal system and eighteen items to measure properties of the formal system. Respondents were given a choice between school related and non-school related options for each item. A teacher whose responses totaled 50 percent or higher in a job oriented direction was classified as job oriented for the purpose of determining whether or not teaching was a "Central Life Interest" for the subject. The same criteria and procedures were applied to measure teacher attachment to the formal and informal sub-systems. The statistical procedure used to test the hypotheses of the study was a chi square test.

FINDINGS

A. Total Job Orientation

Much of the literature suggests that members of a profession have a markedly greater commitment to work than do workers in other job classifications. Teaching, however, appears to be a marginal profession in that (a) the teacher does not directly control the working conditions of his group, (b) controls are imposed on the teacher's dispersion of specialized knowledge and skills, (c) he does not control nor determine the qualifications of those who enter his work group, (d) his life is largely controlled by a board possessing little of his specialized training or knowledge, (e) his license to deviate from lay conduct is seriously limited, and (f) the teacher receives limited deference from the larger society. In view of this marginalism, it was hypothesized that a significantly higher number of the teachers studied would score

as attached to non-job oriented social worlds than to job oriented social worlds.

It was found that 54 percent of the teachers studied scored as job oriented while 46 percent scored as non-job oriented. Although the total job orientation scores did not reveal a statistically significant difference in the predicted direction of non-job orientation, it is equally important to note the lack of statistical support for the opposite direction, that of job orientation. Examination of the two systems further supports the difference as significant.

B. The Informal System

This system includes relationships and experiences which are not directly a product of the formal organization and are not prescribed by its rules, regulations, and procedures. Casual conversations, friendship interactions, and leisure-time activities are behaviors illustrative of informal group experiences.

Given a choice between school and non-school informal interactions, 77 percent of the teachers scored in a non-job oriented direction, while 23 percent scored as job oriented. The hypothesis that a significantly higher number of teachers would score non-job oriented than job oriented in the informal system was confirmed. The fact that the secondary teachers studied were not job oriented in the informal sector might well determine whether or not the work activities are being accomplished on a minimal or maximal basis. If in fact the genuine, meaningful, interpersonal social relationships occur for the teacher in non-job oriented social worlds, then the likelihood is even greater that the school is a means to other ends -- to provide the income necessary to participate

in preferred human associations in the community, among non-school friends and in the family.

C. The Formal System

This system includes the relationships between an organization, its officials, and its members, which are prescribed by organizational rules, regulations, and procedures which may be called organizational experiences. It also includes the relationships between a teacher and his actual job performance, the tasks he performs using his specialized knowledge and skills -- which may be called technical experiences. Based on similar studies by Dubin and others (5,9,11), it was hypothesized that in the formal system a significantly higher number of the secondary school teachers studied would score as job oriented rather than non-job oriented. The study revealed that 88 percent of the subjects scored job oriented in the formal system while 12 percent scored as non-job oriented.

D. Organizational Experiences

Based again on earlier studies by Dubin and others (5,9,11), it was hypothesized that significantly more of the teachers studied would rate job oriented rather than non-job oriented for their organizational experiences. Of the observed responses in the study, 87 percent scored in a job oriented direction. The hypothesis of homogeneity was clearly rejected and inspection revealed that teacher responses were in the predicted direction of job orientation. The school was shown to be the most meaningful context for secondary teachers when organizational experiences were brought into focus.

E. Technical Experiences

Confirming the prediction that the secondary teachers would score job oriented in the application of their specialized skills and knowledge, it was found that 87 percent of the subjects were job oriented in the technical sector, while only 13 percent scored as non-job oriented. It may be said that the formal education of the teacher, for the most part, has prepared him for application of his specialized knowledge and skill. It may be further argued that the most obvious expectation placed on the teacher by both the school and the broader society is the application of his specialized training.

F. Demographic Measures

An attempt was made to identify some possible within-group teacher differences by hypothesizing that no significant difference would be revealed on the basis of characteristics such as male-female, married-single, AFT-NEA, small school-large school, science-non-science, and bachelors degree-masters degree. None of the calculated chi square values for these six demographic variables proved significant at the .05 level in job vs. non-job orientations of the teachers studied.

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

In further analyzing the organizational, technical, and informal sectors, one may base interpretation on several important assumptions. It is suggested that a teacher lightly committed to his occupation is not apt to expend the energies necessary to exploit fully the knowledge explosion or to learn and incorporate into his repertoire of teaching strategies new, imaginative and innovative approaches. It is assumed

that a lightly committed teacher will tend to be a guardian of the status quo rather than a change agent, since the former requires much less effort. He will tend to play out the most obvious expectations placed on his job performance rather than constantly to seek better approaches which may be currently unrecognized by the broader society, may even threaten large segments of the society, and may therefore bring a negative reaction upon the teacher. He will tend to view the school as a means to acquire ends to participate in non-school interactions which have more social value for him than does teaching.

Only about ½ of the secondary teachers studied were found to be job oriented in their total value commitment to teaching. Eight out of ten teachers preferred non-school related environments for their informal human relations; it appears that their perceived primary social relationships take place neither within the school nor with school related activities. In the formal dimension of social behavior, teachers are job oriented in that nearly nine out of ten teachers are attached to the school as an organization and do prefer school related interactions for the application of their specialized knowledge and skill.

The generalization suggested by these findings is that the global and complete dedication of self to work assumed to be characteristic of professional occupations does not exist for the secondary school teachers studied. Whether or not need or total commitment is an available option can be determined only through further research. From this study, at least, it seems clear that the view that teaching in and of itself is a rewarding and satisfying social experience for the teacher is indeed challenged. As one studies further the reasons for this lack of total

commitment, one may uncover ways of increasing teacher involvement. If a more complete commitment of self to teaching by the teacher is desirable and needed, then educators at all levels must examine the process and content of teacher preparation programs and the conditions of the school systems in which teachers function.

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